

Profiles

In this chapter, you will learn how to—

- 6.1 invent the content of your profile.
- 6.2 organize and draft your profile in an attention-grabbing way.
- 6.3 choose a style that captures the essence of your topic.
- 6.4 design your profile to fit the place where it will be used.

Profiles are used to describe interesting people, places, and events. Profiles create a snapshot of a person, place, or event by viewing the subject through a specific angle that reveals something essential—an insight, idea, theme, or social cause. Some of the best profiles focus on subjects that seem ordinary but are symbolic of larger issues.

Most profiles are written about people, but places and events can offer interesting topics, too. For example, you could profile a place in a city, a building, or a whole town, describing it as a living being. Or, you might write a profile of an event (e.g., a basketball game, a protest, a historical battle, an earthquake) in way that makes the subject come alive.

Profiles appear in a variety of print and online publications. They are common in magazines like People, Rolling Stone, and Sports Illustrated. They are regularly featured on Web sites like Slate.com, National Review Online, and Politico. Profiles are also mainstays on cable channels like ESPN, A&E, and the Biography Channel.

In college and in your career, you will write profiles for Web sites, brochures, reports, and proposals. Profiles are also called backgrounders and bios, and they appear under headings or links such as “About Us” or “Our Team.” You will also write your own profile or bio for social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn.

When you recognize something as a draft or idea, it's something you'd read in a magazine

3 typed
ds
pages

city,
building
town

→ old
Oak
+ P. 22

→ Vicki

bio

Inventing Your Profile's Content

Begin by choosing someone or something you can easily access. If you are profiling a person, choose someone you can shadow, interview, or research as your subject for the profile. If your subject is a place or event, choose something that you can portray as a living being that moves, has emotions, and is changing in an interesting way. The key is finding a subject that is fascinating to *you*, because if you are not interested, you will find it very difficult to spark your readers' interest.

6.1 invent the content of your profile.

Inquiring: Finding Out What You Already Know

Take some time to think about what makes this person, place, or event unique or interesting. Try to develop an angle that will depict your topic in a way that makes your profile thought provoking and meaningful. Use one or more invention methods to generate ideas for your profile. Here are a couple of especially good invention tools for profiles.

Answer the Five-W and How Questions. Journalists often use the Five-W and How questions (who, what, where, when, why, how) to get started.

Who? Who exactly is this person? Who influenced your subject, and who has your subject influenced? Who is regularly involved with your subject?

What? What exactly is the person, place, or event you are profiling? What does the person, place, or event look like? What has your subject done that is especially interesting to you and your readers? What is unique about this person, place, or event?

Where? Where did this person come from? Where did important events happen? Where did the events start and end? Where is this person now?

When? When did the major events in the profile happen? When did the story begin? When did it end, or when will it probably end?

Why? Why did this person or others behave as they did? Why has this person, event, or organization succeeded or failed? Why has your subject changed in a significant way?

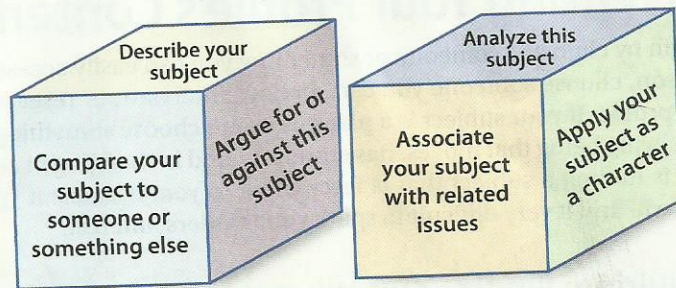
How? How did this person's background shape his or her outlook on life? How does your subject respond to people and events? How will this person, organization, place, or event be understood or misunderstood in the future?

Use Cubing. Cubing allows you to explore your topic from six different viewpoints or perspectives (Figure 6.1). *Describe* your subject by paying attention to your senses. *Compare* your subject to someone or something else. *Associate* this subject with related issues or things you already know about. *Analyze* this subject, looking for any patterns, hidden questions, or unique characteristics. *Apply* your subject as a character by describing it in action. *Argue* for or against: Is this person or group of

plus
sensory
details

FIGURE 6.1 Using Cubing to Inquire About Your Subject

Cubing is a good way to study your topic from different viewpoints or perspectives. Each side of the cube urges you to see the person, place, or event you are profiling somewhat differently, generating new ideas and insights.



people right or wrong, a saint or a scoundrel, or has this place helped bring about good or bad results?

Researching: Finding Out What Others Know

Good research is essential to writing an interesting profile. You should begin by identifying a variety of online, print, and empirical sources.

Online Sources. Use an Internet search engine to gather biographical or historical information on this person, place, or event. Then gather background information on the time period you are writing about.

Print Sources. Consult newspapers, magazines, and books. These print sources are probably available at your campus library or a local public library.

Empirical Sources. Interview your subject and/or talk to people who can provide first-hand knowledge or experience about this person, place, or event. You might also ask whether you can observe or even shadow him or her. For a profile about a place or an event, you can interview people who live in the place you are profiling or who experienced the event you are writing about.

Interviewing. An interview is often the best way to gather information for a profile. If possible, meet people in person. If that not possible, phone calls or e-mails are often good ways to ask people questions about themselves or others.

Remember to script your questions before your interview. Then, while conducting the interview, be sure to *listen and respond*—asking follow-up questions that engage with what the interviewee has told you.

Shadowing. If the subject of your profile is a person, you could “shadow” him or her (with the person’s permission, of course), learning more about that person’s world, the people in it, and how he or she interacts with them. For a place or event profile, spend some time exploring and observing, either by visiting the physical location or

examining pictures and firsthand accounts. Keep your notebook, a camera, and perhaps a digital recorder handy to capture anything that might translate into an interesting angle or a revealing quotation.

In Chapter 25, "Finding Sources and Collecting Evidence," you can learn more about interviewing and other empirical forms of research.

Organizing and Drafting Your Profile

A well-organized profile will capture the attention of readers and keep their attention. As you organize your ideas and write your first draft, you should keep a couple of key questions in mind:

6.2 organize and draft your profile in an attention-grabbing way.

What do you find most interesting, surprising, or important? As you researched your subject, what did you discover that you weren't expecting? How can you make this discovery interesting for your readers?

What important conflicts does your subject face? People are most interesting when they face important challenges. Similarly, places and events are scenes of conflict and change. What is the principal conflict for your subject?

Keep in mind that the profile is one of the most flexible genres. You can arrange the information you collected in a variety of ways to suit your topic, purpose, and readers and the contexts in which they will read the profile.

The Introduction

You want to start strong with a lead that hints at or captures the main point of the profile.

Identify Your Topic and Purpose. Your introduction should identify the subject of your profile, while directly or indirectly revealing your purpose. You might also want to show readers why the person, place, or event you are profiling is significant in some way.

State Your Main Point or Thesis. The placement of your main point (thesis) depends on the type of profile you are writing. In a descriptive profile, you can state your main point, or thesis, in the introduction. Tell your readers up front what you are trying to show about your subject. In a narrative profile, you probably won't state your main point or thesis in the introduction. Instead, you should wait until the conclusion to reveal your overall point.

The Body

In the body, you can include a variety of moves such as describing your topic, offering background information, recounting anecdotes, or revealing important ideas through dialogue.

"every
body
thinks
the
wife
knows"

Describe Your Topic. Use plenty of details to describe how your subject looks, moves, and sounds. In some situations, you might use your full senses to describe your subject's environment, including how things smell, sound, and feel.

Offer Background on the Topic. You can tell your readers something about the time periods and places in which your subject lived or lives now. Explore the circumstances that led to key events you describe in your profile.

Use Anecdotes to Tell Stories. An anecdote is a small story that reveals something important about a person or a place. Your anecdotes should also reflect the main point of your profile by revealing something important about your subject.

Reveal Important Information Through Dialogue or Quotes. Dialogue and quotes are often the best way to reveal something important about the topic of your profile without coming out and stating something directly. However, don't overuse dialogue or quotes. Because quotes receive special attention from readers, reserve them for insights or changes that are especially important.

The Conclusion

Profiles shouldn't just end; they should leave an impression. Because endings, like beginnings, get special attention from readers, your conclusion should include information, ideas, or images that leave readers with a sense of the point (or thesis) you want to make. Conclude with a strong impression that will stay with your readers.

Keep your conclusion brief. You should state or restate your main point (your thesis) with emphasis. If you have included a thesis statement in your introduction, phrase the main point differently here. Then, offer a look at the future in which you say something about what lies ahead for the person, place, or event you profiled.

Choosing an Appropriate Style

6.3 choose a style that captures the essence of your topic.

If possible, the style of your profile should reflect the essential character of the person, place, or event you are describing. If you are profiling an exciting or restless person, you want your tone or voice to be equally exciting and energetic. If you are profiling someone or something that is sad or dour, again, your profile's tone or voice should match that feeling.

Change the Pace. If you want to convey energy and spirit, speed up the pace by using abrupt, short sentences and phrases that will increase the heartbeat of the text. If you want your readers to sense a slower pace or thoughtfulness, you can use longer sentences that slow things down. All sentences, however, should be "breathing length," which means they can be read out loud comfortably in one breath.

Choose Words That Set a Specific Tone. Think of one word or phrase that captures the main feeling or attitude you want to express about the subject of your profile. Do you want to convey a sense of joy, sadness, energy, devotion, goodwill, seriousness, or anxiety? Pick a word and then use brainstorming or concept mapping to come up with more words and phrases that associate with that word. You can then seed those words and phrases into your profile to create this specific tone or feeling.

Get into Character. You might find the best way to develop a specific voice or tone is to inhabit the character of the person, place, or event you are profiling. Imagine you *are* that person (or at the place or event). From this different perspective, how would you describe the people, objects, and happenings around you? Are you amped up? Are you anxious or scared? Are you worried? Use words that fit this character.

3. With your group, come up with five national issues that you all seem to care about. They don't have to be enormous issues. For each of these issues, pick a specific person, group, place, or event that is symbolic of that problem or its solution. Then talk about how a profile of these representatives could be used to help readers understand the issue you linked with them.
1. Choose one of the profiles included in this chapter and analyze it using the features listed in the At-a-Glance in this chapter. Does the profile adhere exactly to these features? List three ways the profile matches this description of the genre. Then list three ways the profile does not match the description.
2. On the Internet, find a profile of someone who interests you. Present this profile to your writing group, identifying its strengths and weaknesses. Then identify the main point of the profile and show your group how the author uses the profile to make a larger point.
3. With your group, list five places or buildings on campus that seem to come alive when people are in them. Pick one of these places and describe it as though it is a person or a living being of some kind. How can a place be similar to a person? How can personifying a place make it more interesting for readers?

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